GUATEMALA 2014

Memorias en Foto

In Guatemala, I noticed a greater dependency on water than what was described in the presentations, books and videos in class. While riding to the lake, I witnessed many farms that depended on water for a fruitful harvest, and therefore a living. Although I did not see any women fetching water, I saw many women carrying large jugs on their heads, most likely their water supply for the day. Lake Atitlán was beautiful, and from talking with Darvy, a great sense of pride for Guatemala. Many times our translators said that we should all return for a romantic weekend at one of the lakeside villages, to stimulate the struggling economy. As much as they promoted the lake, I saw a desperation in the eyes of the boat captains standing on the shore. We were one of the only boats crossing when we arrived, likely a result of dwindling tourism due to the rise in bacteria levels. As we learned in Hilary’s presentation, there are many projects working to bring and purify water in the region, there is still work that needs to be done. This lack of fresh water needs to be recognized on a national, if not global level for it to be resolved as most water sources in Guatemala are polluted.
Hay muchos tipos de comida en Guatemala, lleno con verduras y frutas. Nosotros aprendíamos muchos platos guatemaltecos antes del viaje por ejemplo, tamales, pepián, y por supuesto, tortillas. En el libro “To the Mountain and Back” la autora describió el proceso para tortillas que require mucho tiempo para las mujeres. Yo tuve mucho emoción probar todos los platos, y hacer tortillas. Me gustaba todos los platos, pero no comía platos guatemaltecos tanto yo quiso. (Glittenberg)

Though most of our food was Guatemalan I felt that many of our meals had been “Americanized.” Our hotel served us chicken breasts, mushrooms and rice one night, which is not very different than what I could order at a standard American restaurant. Also, in Antigua there are many american restaurants, as described in “To the Mountain and Back”. I was disappointed that we ate at two of them. Though the food was great, I wished we would have been more immersed in the foods from Guatemala. I was also disappointed in my country, that our people do not appreciate the local fare, and force meals to be Americanized. (Glittenberg)

I also noticed a stark difference between fast food in Guatemala, and fast food in America. The first meal I had in Guatemala was at a fast food restaurant called Pollo Campero. When we walked in, we were seated by a host, and a waitress brought us our food and drinks. At an American restaurant like Pollo Campero, we would have ordered at the counter, and not have received quite as nice of service as we did. It seemed that the employees of Pollo Campero had such pride in their work and the service they provided. At first I thought it might be because we were gringos, but as I observed the rest of the restaurant, they treated each table the same. Even waitresses at a restaurant had a strong work ethic, as described in many books and videos in class.
Hay mucha personas indígenas en Guatemala, y cada tribu tiene diferente típica, o ropa. Las mujeres llevan un huipil y una corta cada día. Un huipil es la blusa tradicional de los Mayas. Muchas veces es hecho a mano y tiene muchos colores y patronas. Antes de la Guerra Civil, cada tribu tiene su propia color. Sin embargo, durante la guerra, mujeres llevaban diferentes colores para que los guerreros no podían identificar. Las cortas también hecho a mano, y tienen colores y patronas. Las madres también llevan rebozos para llevar sus hijos, o productos del mercado. El huipil es un símbolo de la cultura en Guatemala, pero está desapareciendo.

Guatemalan women are beautiful inside and out. Each woman I met welcomed me into her country with warmth and care. While they were kind and insightful, they all expressed their sense of style differently. Driving through the streets, I observed mostly western-style clothing. Typical outfits included jeans, a tighter top, and sandals. Never once did I see a pair of shorts on a woman, only on younger girls. Most men wore pants and a t-shirt or button down. Clothing generally seemed to be hand-me-downs from the United States, as described in class. I also saw many market stalls selling these gently-used items, especially on the ride to Patzún and Zaragoza. As a young girl, I know how fun it is to shop for brand new clothes. I felt for the teenage girls walking around, who are most likely aware that these clothes were discarded by other girls. I then started to wonder if wearing these items hurt their self-esteem, especially during their fragile teenage years. I know of many self-esteem programs in the United States, and I think they could be useful in Guatemala too.

As we got closer to Patzún, more and more women were seen wearing “tipica” in their tribes colors. These women were beautiful, and wore many colorful tops. At the school we visited, the female students put on a fashion show of sorts with all the typical clothing of the surrounding villages. Each outfit was unique in its patterns, head pieces and colors, highlighting the differences in the Mayan subcultures. Specifically, the women from Patzún wore black and white plaid skirts and a huipil with reds and pinks. The models looked bashfully confident as they walked down the aisle, secretly loving the attention, as most teenage girls do. They each smiled as they stood at the front of the room, confident and proud of their culture and fashion. I believe this is similar as american girls, confidence is often mixed with appearances. Although these women looked beautiful, wearing “tipica” is becoming less popular, and more women are wearing western style clothing. This is a shame to me, as it is a symbol of the rich Guatemalan culture. I chose this photo because it displays the uniqueness of each area’s clothing, just how each Guatemalan woman is different.
Transportación en Guatemala es difícil, especialmente en el campo donde mucha gente vive. Las calles no pueden pasar por las montañas ni bosque. Las personas del campo necesitan usar “chicken busses” viajar a la ciudad, mercado o médicos. Estos autobuses traen todos los tipos de personas, y sus cosas. Muchas veces hay pan, fruta, niños y en unos casos, animales pequeños. Es un gran problema, especialmente para personas con discapacidades múltiples. En clase aprendimos sobre las dificultades del voluntario de los Peace Corps. La familia tiene que conducir en un chicken bus por horas para una reunión con médicos. Hay carreteras, pero solamente en las ciudades. No hay muchas leyes, pero la policía está trabajando parar este problema. (Glittenberg)

I never could imagine actually driving on Guatemalan roads. They are windy, slim, and don’t have speed limits. Yet, as a passenger, I have never felt more safe. Darvy was a great driver, and kept us safe among the chicken busses, motorcycles, and other cars on the roadways. During our long commutes, he would explain the unwritten rules of the road, like how only the criminals take off their motorcycle vests. From my safe seat in Darvy’s van, I observed chicken bus after chicken bus wail its horn as it passed us on the shoulder of the highway. These intrigued me ever since I first read about them in “To the Mountain and Back”, and it was surreal to see them in real life. Truly every type of person rode them from a woman carrying bread on her head, to a businessman in a very nice suit. I never saw any chickens on them, but would not be surprised if they hopped out of the back. Though this picture is calm, I believe it truly captures the personality of the chicken bus, which is only enhanced when people are inside of it. Even though the roads are dangerous, they seem to work. I did observe many police officers sitting on the shoulder, and one of our drivers even got a ticket. (for an illegal u-turn!) I was under the impression that like most other laws in Guatemala, traffic would not be enforced. Monitoring traffic is a great start for Guatemalan police, who are beginning to make more of an appearance in Guatemala.
El mercado es una necesidad en la vida guatemalteco. Muchas personas van al mercado tres veces a semana para comprar comida, ropa, o casos para la casa. El mercado es también una lugar para reuniones con familia y amigas. Muchas personas solteras vienen al mercado buscar para un esposo, o amigos. (Glittenberg) Hay todos tipos de personas en los mercados, ricos, pobres, jóvenes, viejos y turistas. Pero, es una economía muy frágil, y los precios son competitivos. sin embargo, es importantes saber los precios para cosas cada día. Tenía muchas experiencias en el mercado, pero en el mercado en Antigua.

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Market day is truly a social gathering, with all ages and types convening to purchase their daily needs. The first night, Ryan Lavalley took a small group of students to the market. He advised us to split into pairs to seem less invasive. Kate Aronson and I teamed up, and decided to go into the actual market, not the artisan one next door. As we walked deep into the aisles, we smelled fresh tortillas, chu-chus, and fruit. We observed many women peddling their goods with their small children in tow. Some girls even walked up and down the aisles selling small fruits, as pictured above. I saw many children selling things in booths, shining shoes and working much like the economic unit described in To the Mountain and Back. Penny capitalists were shouting, trying to advertise their goods. Many old women stood in a corner chatting over dixie cups of coffee (Glittenberg). We finally decided to turn around, and headed into the artisan market. We were disappointed. It was so quiet, they shops pristine, much different than the stalls of the local market we had just been visited. We wanted the local flavor, the noise and smells to be infused into the market. It seemed like an entirely different country. Americanization is a real problem, and needs to be addressed.
Facilidades del Gobierno

El gobierno del Guatemala es muy corrupto. Supe este problema antes de mi viaje, porque los sitios del web para programas sociales tuvo mucho retórica, y no facto. Veo esta corrupción mucho durante mi tiempo en Guatemala. El Director del ABI llevó un traje de Armani, y un reloj de Rolex cada día. Pensé que el dinero para ABI no va a ABI. También durante mis conversaciones con mis traductores ellos mencionaron que el gobierno no hice nada sobre muchos leyes. Es una lastima, pero mucho oficinas del gobierno estén trabajando cambiar este problema.

My service site was a government run residencial facility for those with neurological disorders, among many other mental disabilities. There are currently about 60 residents ranging from twelve to fifty years old. They all receive physical therapy, occupational therapy, special education and psychological services each day. Though this sounds beneficial, they do not have enough resources to support these services. Though the staff was loving, determined, there was no hiding the immense need of ABI. The facility was all cement, with bars on all windows and doors. Every door was locked, much like a prison. There was color on the walls, yet in some places I saw feces there as well. Residents were unoccupied, many wandered the halls and got into trouble. This lack of occupation was most likely a result of under staffing, and lack of resources. Even during occupational therapy, many residents sat in their wheelchairs while the therapists worked with others; a seen in the photo. While there are four occupational therapists on staff, only two have the necessary supplies needed to provide effective therapy, and they do not share with the other therapists.

Seeing all of this broke my heart, while inspiring me to jump in and start changing the facility. We had to be careful about change, as not to seem overbearing or better than them. Observing the director who wore an Armani suit and Rolex watch to work everyday was very frustrating, and made me wonder where the money was really going, and illustrated the corruption of the Guatemalan government. In order to help the residents and staff of ABI, we decided to take the facility as our client, and provide recommendations, connections, and supplies. Our final project consisted of a presentation and discussion of these things, and how ABI can carry out these recommendations for years to come. The employees were very receptive of our recommendations, and discussed how they can begin to implement them as soon as we left. They were not the only ones who learned, as I walked out of ABI with knowledge of community-based practice, analyzing a facility, and how to create therapy items out of paper plates, water bottles and PVC pipe.
La historia de los maya, o las personas ingenias, es ansioso. Las personas Mayas son de Mexico. La familia es muy importante, y todo la familia viven juntos (Glittenberg). Todos los miembros necesitan trabajar todos los días, en las granjas de cafe, o en casa. Las personas dependen en agricultura, negocios pequeños, y el arte para sobrevivir. Los Mayas son muy religiosos, y tienen dios de la tierra, las montañas, el agua y muchos más. Para dar gracias a dios, tiene ritos antes y después de la cosecha. Nosotras tenemos la oportunidad para ver este cultura y los costumbres en La Vega.

The day we spent at La Vega was full of fun, food and knowledge. Throughout the entire day we got an in-depth look of rural, indigenous Guatemalan culture. The middle school students of La Vega planned an entire day filled with dances, food and rituals. It began with cultural dances scaring away the bad spirits, thanking the gods for the corn, and describing daily life of the farmer. We then listened to student speeches describing the history of Guatemala. Then, an elder of the community spoke to us about his heartbreaking experience of the Civil War. We were also given a “snack” of different corn-based foods such as Atole, chuchus, and tostadas, and later Pepián made by the students. They were both delicious. After the snack, we watched a fashion show of the different tipicas of Guatemala. The day ended with an indigenous blessing for our safe travels, complete with a chicken sacrifice.

As much as the day taught me about Guatemalan culture, it taught me more about the gringo presence in Guatemala. We were welcomed by students lining the stairway, clapping was we walked in, much like a celebrity on the red carpet. We were then showed to our seats, given waters and candy. Throughout the day, they kept saying how it was an honor to have us. Realistically, I felt it was an honor for me to be there. I felt uncomfortable, an average ohioan being treated as a princess by people who have next to nothing. It bothered me, and I really wanted it to be known that we were felt blessed to be there in their presence, and learning about them. There was one quote from the day that I will never forget. The principal said at the end of the day: “I hope we have learned as much from us as we have learned from you.” I thought about it the whole drive back, and how we could have possibly taught them anything by acting as an audience, as seen in the photo above. I never came up with an answer other than our mannerisms, respectful listening and eagerness to learn.
El Volcán Pacaya


The hike up Pacaya was a great capstone to our work in Guatemala. As an adventurous soul, I was waiting for this day the entire week. As we drove to Lake Atitlan, and around Guatemala, I stared out the window daydreaming about climbing the mountains. When the day finally came, almost the entire group came along, even Georganna! As we climbed, I chatted with our guide, who had lived on the Volcano his entire life. He was such an inspiration, he worked in order to take English classes so he could get a better job. I wanted to talk in spanish, but he asked that we talk in English so he could practice. He told me all about the vegetation, the volcano, and what life is like in his small volcano village. He truly demonstrated how hardworking Guatemalans are. He is a guide, a translator, and also teaches english to children in his village. I asked what he did in his free time, and he laughed and said he never had any. He was truly a testament to the Guatemalan work ethic. It was great to meet such an inspirational, hardworking man on my last day in Guatemala. He truly inspired me to work hard, and reach all my goals I have in my life, just as he has.
Entrevista con Darvy

During our visit to Lake Atitlan I got the honor of sitting next to Darvy as we rode across the lake to San Santiago Atitlan. We started talking about the lake, and the volcanoes around it. He told me the mythical stories about how the lake was formed, the same one Hilary shared in her presentation. He also told me about the small mountain in front of one of the volcanoes, and how it is actually the loser in a grand mythical battle many years ago. I then started asking about the towns around it, and if their economies are based on tourism. He said yes, but they are struggling. As stated in my portfolio, he told me to come back with my husband for a romantic vacation, which turned into a running joke for the rest of the week. He also told me about the towns that had been flooded out due to the rising water levels of the lake. I asked what happened to the residents, and he said they were forced out of their homes, and had to rebuild on higher ground. I asked if any organizations or the government helped move these people, and he sort of chuckled and said no. I thought that maybe they would have at least offered some of the social programs I researched. He then explained how the water levels are always rising, and the government is not really doing anything to stop it, or channel the water elsewhere. I asked where it could go, and he said it would displace many tribes, so it may really not be a good idea. Overall, my conversation with Darvy taught me about the mythical history of the lake, local economy around it, and the environmental problems they are facing.
Sources


Various student presentations and handouts